

**May 23, 2019 School Board Meeting
Public Comments**

Intro, Background, and Communication Improvement

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Hello everyone, thank you for allowing us to speak here today and for providing us your full attention late on this Thursday night.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Riley Casagrande. I am a Junior at TC Williams and I am Co-founder and President of CURE--Community United for Renewable Energy. CURE's mission is to address climate change and other environmental degradation through education and through actual financial investment in making schools more sustainably operated.

Started right here in Alexandria, CURE is now made up of about 30 TC Williams students and we expect to grow more at TC next year. Additionally, CURE will look to spread its work to other school districts in the coming year and that work will be headed by Kenneth Warren, who is graduating from TC in a few weeks and from whom you will hear later.

My personal focus as President of CURE in my senior year will be to lead the effort here in Alexandria to make our school system and our city a more sustainably minded place. I am excited to get to know those of you on the board and to build our relationship and our ability to cooperate on environmental strategy to improve the present and the future for the students of Alexandria. I will be the primary CURE contact person for ACPS and the school board from today forward.

We have come here today to have the opportunity to speak to all of you in the same room at the same time. We have some concerns regarding the status of the CURE-ACPS partnership and projects we are pursuing together.

In the January 2019, CURE signed a formal partnership with ACPS. We were extremely excited to formalize our relationship and open up the myriad of opportunities provided to us by this relationship with the school system. Because climate change and sustainability is probably the leading issue for my generation, we believe it is necessary that our local community takes action to reduce our contribution to pollution and carbon emission and increase awareness and understanding of climate change in Alexandria. We believe that we, as CURE, act as a voice of our generation and of the ACPS student

population and the widespread desire to see our city take serious action regarding climate change.

The partnership we created this winter outlines a few specific agreements between CURE and ACPS about communication and projects that will be pursued. We are here today because we feel that while CURE has done our very best to fulfill our side of the agreement, we feel that ACPS has not followed through with your commitments. While we very well understand the pressures of your role and the many projects you are undertaking, we believe that we should develop greater accountability surrounding our agreement in order to effectively increase the sustainability of Alexandria and improve the futures of ACPS students.

One of the major areas in which we feel that ACPS has not properly honored our agreement is Communication. The partnership states that CURE will provide weekly email updates to ACPS staff about our progress and our goals. We have followed through with this provision and have continued to send updates at a constant interval. Another part of the agreement stated that ACPS will include CURE in meetings involving decisions on environmental policy and CURE's efforts. ACPS also agreed to inform us of any decisions made including the logic behind said decisions. We have had great contact with Erika Gulick and a number of other ACPS staff; however, particularly in the last couple of weeks some decisions have been made regarding CURE's projects that came as a complete surprise to us at CURE. You will hear more about the details of this situation from Kenneth and CJ in a few minutes. I would like now to emphasize, however, how we would like to ask for improved communication between CURE and ACPS in order to improve the effectiveness of our partnership and in order to better the Alexandria community.

CURE would like to request designation of a specific CURE liaison on the school board. This individual would ensure that all board members are equally informed about CURE's actions and will communicate the Board's decisions and logic to CURE so as to prevent miscommunication. In addition to this, we would appreciate increased transparency from ACPS regarding decisions that are relevant to CURE.

We really appreciate the effort that you all put in to improving our school system and would love to do our part to help you improve this community. The only way we can do this is with constant and transparent communication from yourselves on the school board and the entirety of the school system. We would love to continue to talk about the possibility of establishing a specific liaison for CURE in the school board in order to streamline our communication.

As I take over CURE operations in Alexandria in the coming months, I look forward to using this improved communication to build our relationship and enhance Alexandria's sustainability. Thank you.